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BATMAN.

LEGENDS OF THE

DARK KNIGHT®

Gothic

GRANT MORRISON • KLAUS JANSON

PART THREE OF FIVE

Gothic
a romance

By Grant Morrison and Klaus Janson

IN FIVE VOLUMES

"–Mon ame est un tombeau que, mauvais cenobits,
Depuis l'eternite je parcours et j'habite;
Rien n'embellit les murs de cloitre odieux."

LE MAUVAIS MOINE

volume three

The Burning Nun

Colored by Steve Buccellato
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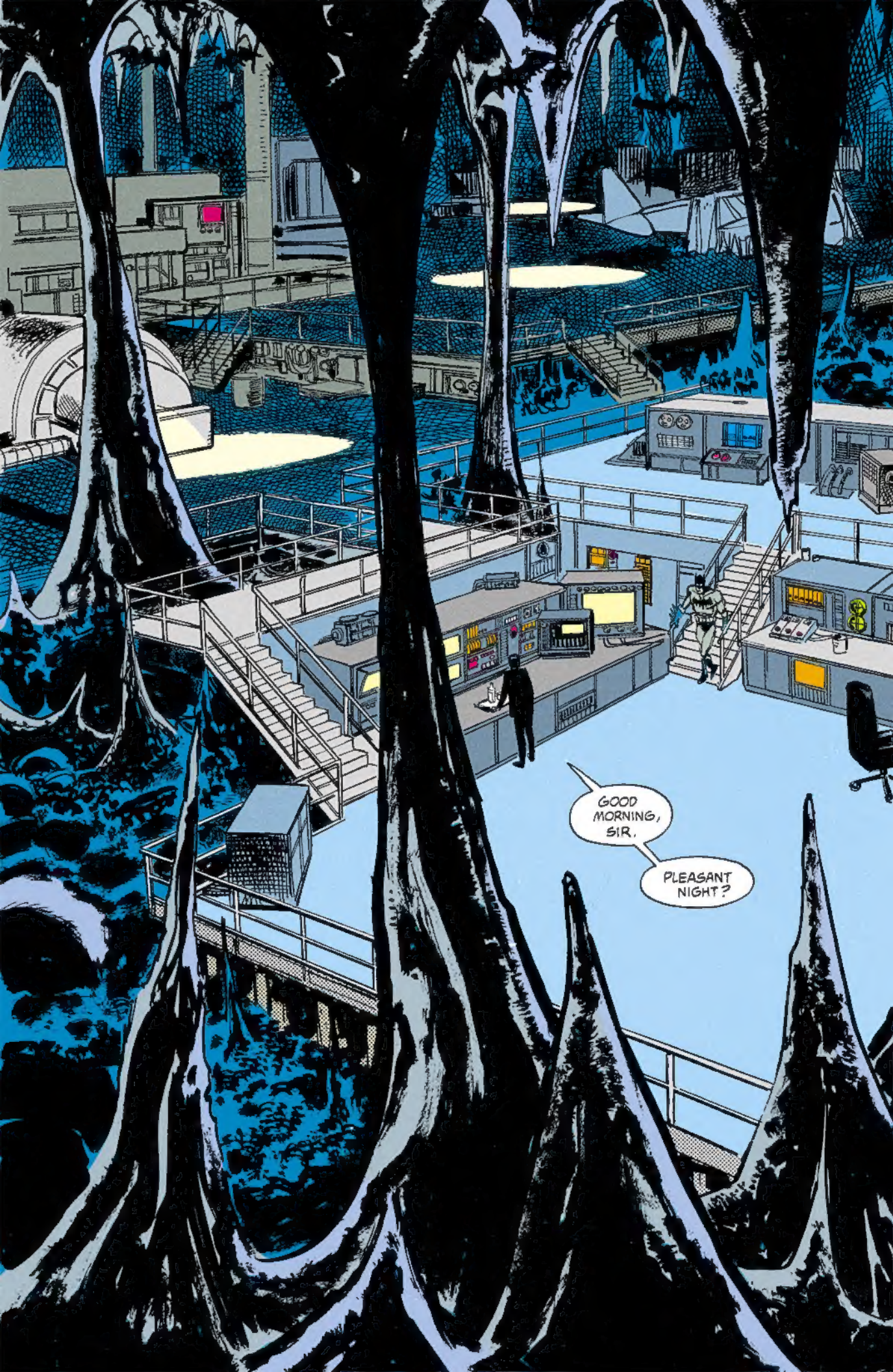
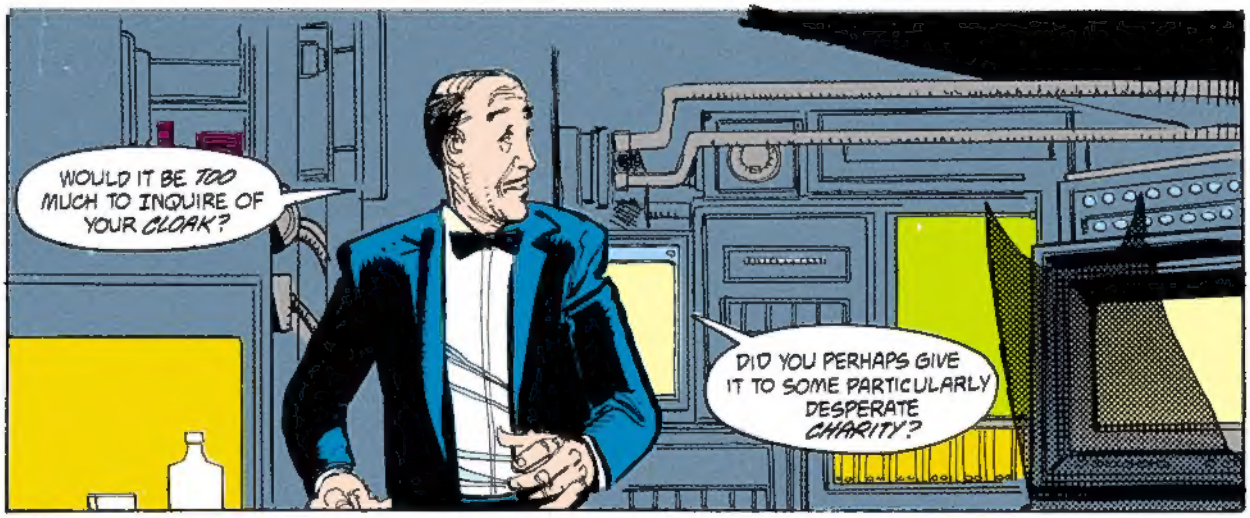
CONVERSION BY WILDSTORM

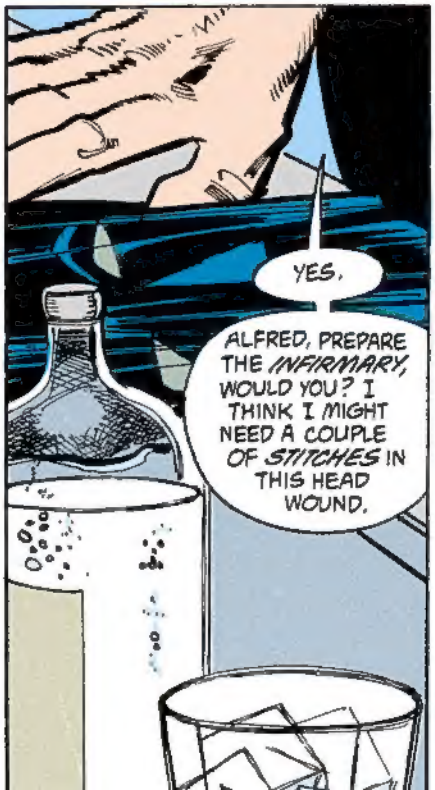

GOOD MORNING, SIR.
PLEASANT NIGHT?


WOULD IT BE TOO MUCH TO INQUIRE OF YOUR CLOAK?
DID YOU PERHAPS GIVE IT TO SOME PARTICULARLY DESPERATE CHARITY?

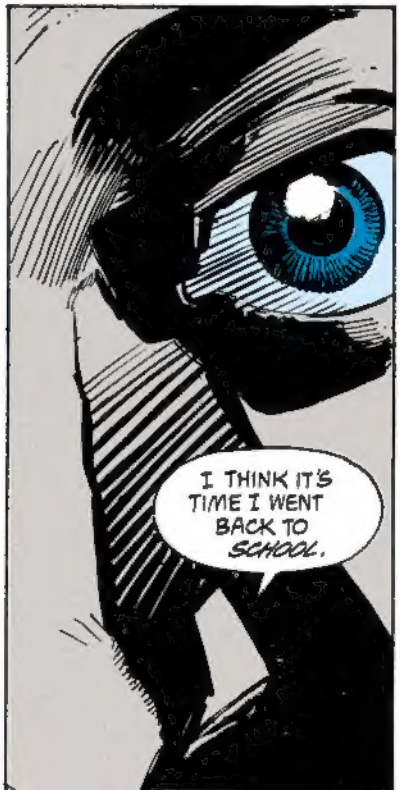
LOST IN A FALL.
THE NECK BRACE IN MY COWL WAS A GOOD IDEA, ALFRED. I'D HAVE BROKEN MY NECK WITHOUT IT.

TONIGHT I MET THE MAN WHO'S BEEN MURDERING GOTHAM'S GANG BOSSES.
IT WAS MY OLD SCHOOL HEADMASTER, MR. WINCHESTER.
WHAT AN INTERESTING EDUCATION YOU MUST HAVE HAD.

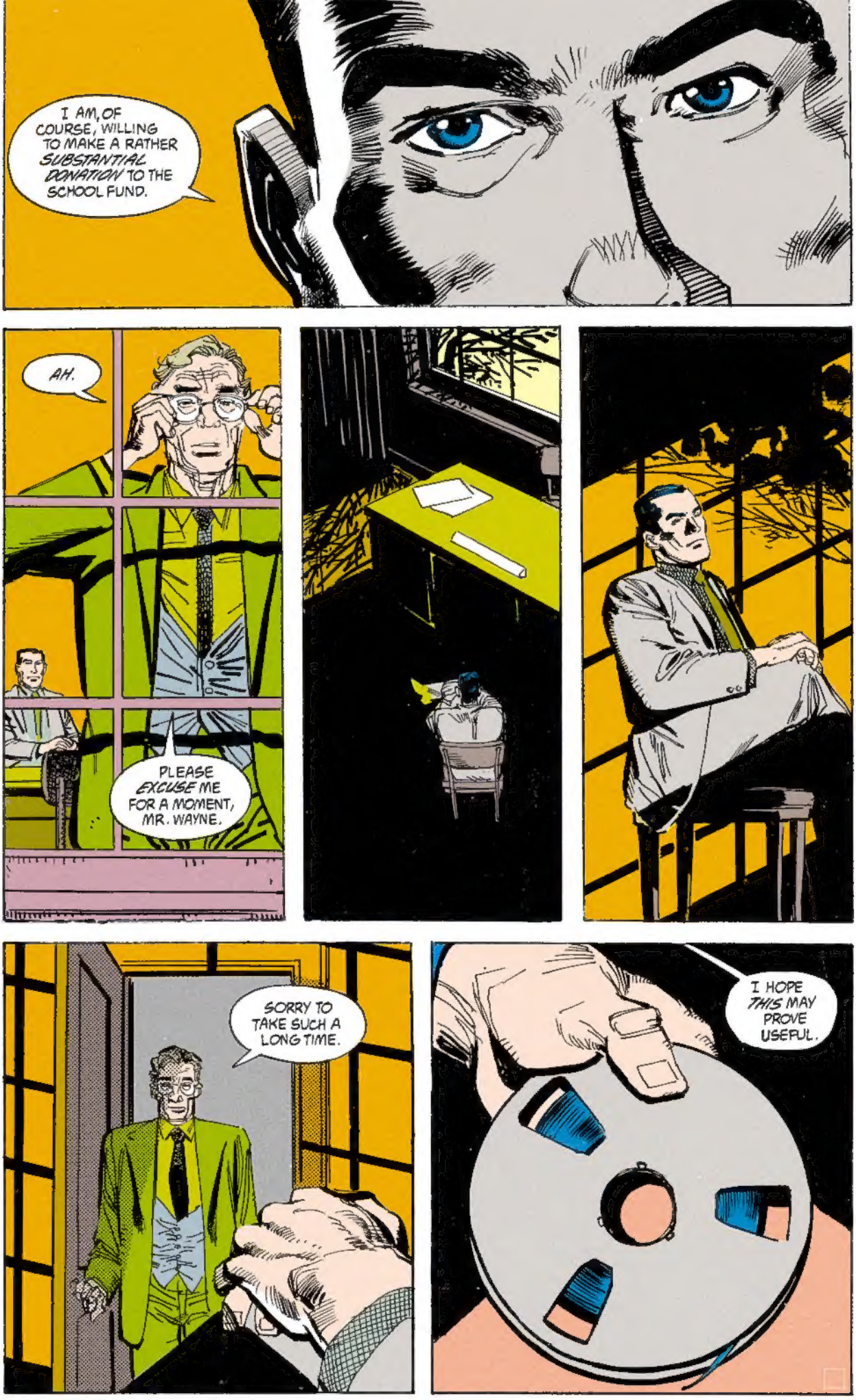
HE MUST HAVE BEEN IN HIS 40'S THEN.
IT'S TWENTY YEARS LATER AND HE'S STILL IN HIS 40'S.
HOW FRIGHTFULLY UNUSUAL.

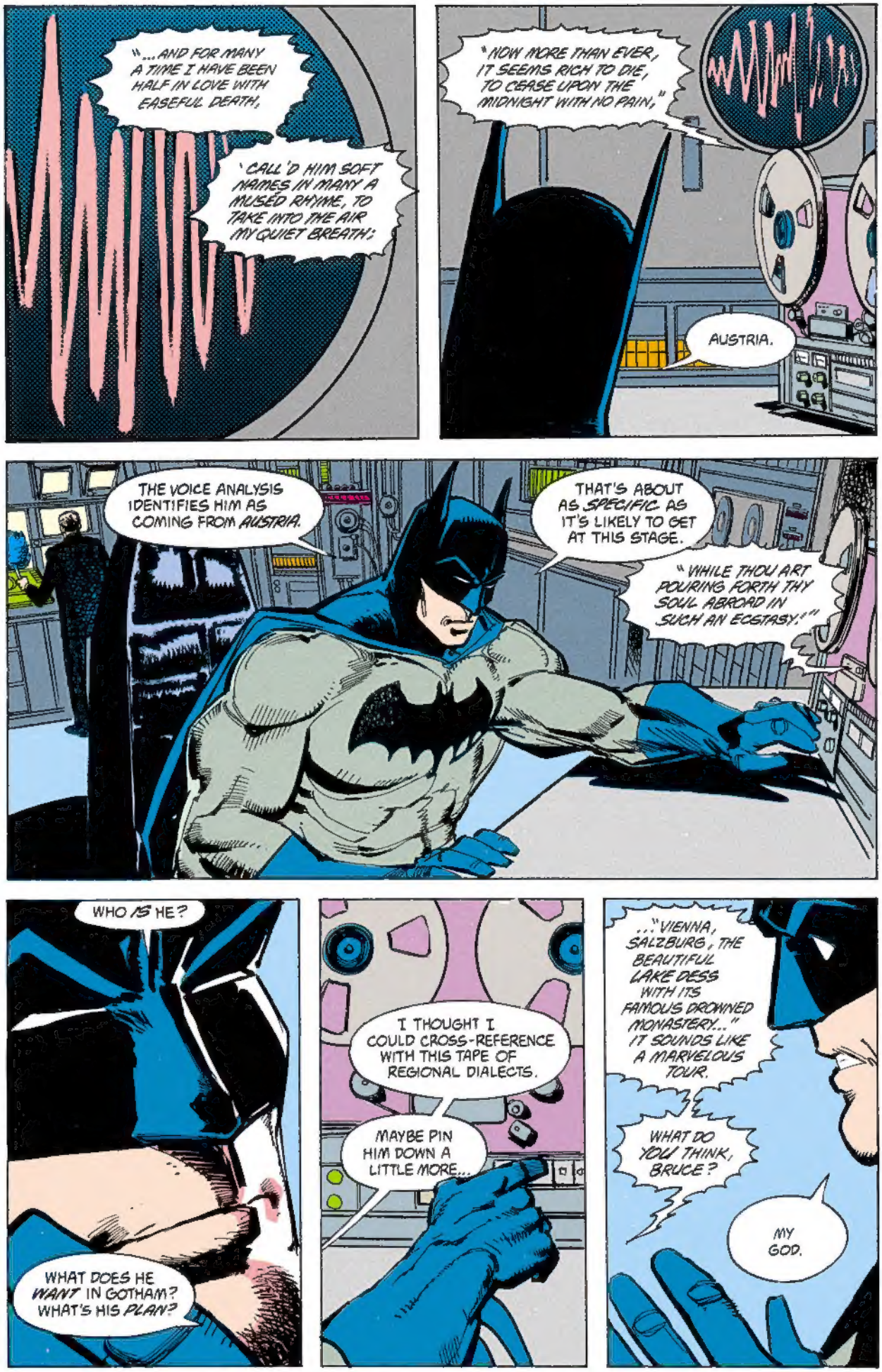

YES.
ALFRED, PREPARE THE INFIRMARY, WOULD YOU? I THINK I MIGHT NEED A COUPLE OF STITCHES IN THIS HEAD WOUND.

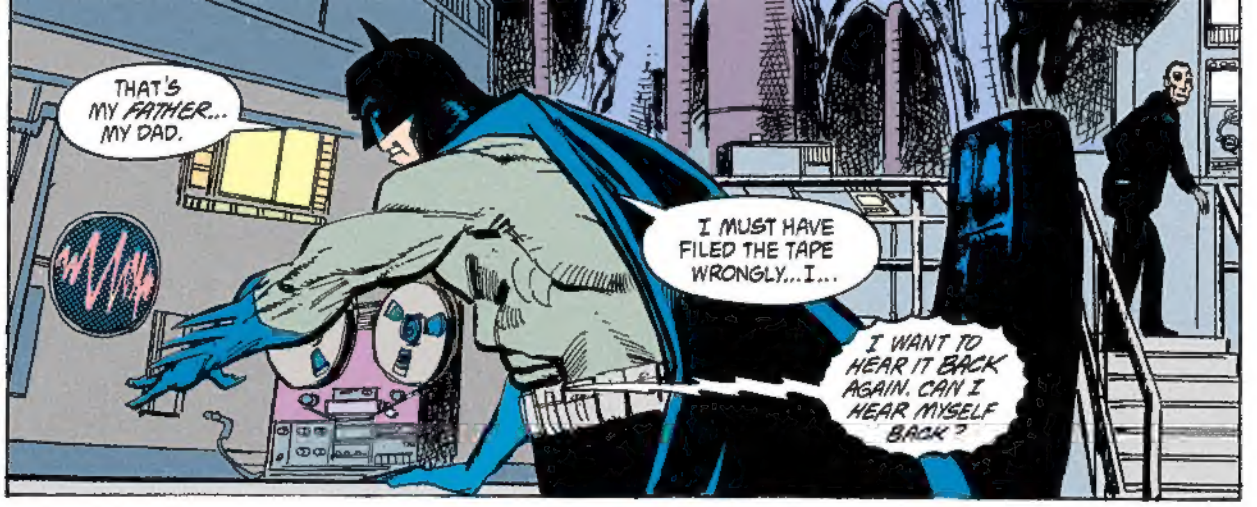
MORE THAN A COUPLE, I SHOULD SAY, MASTER BRUCE.
WILL THAT BE ALL?
FOR THE MOMENT, WAKE ME AT TWO, PLEASE.

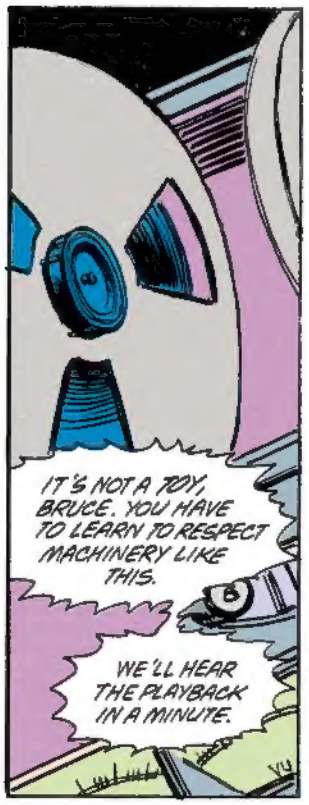

I THINK IT'S TIME I WENT BACK TO SCHOOL.

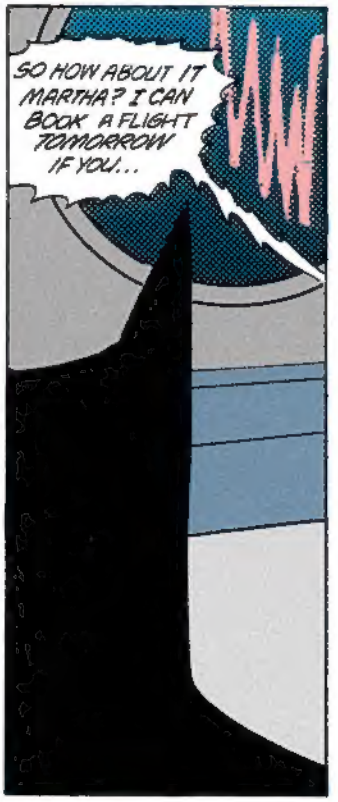
...WELL, IT'S ALWAYS A PLEASURE TO SEE ONE OF OUR OLD BOYS DOING SO WELL, WAYNE, BUT I'M NOT ENTIRELY SURE I UNDERSTAND WHY YOU'VE COME HERE...
AS I SAID, I SEEM TO REMEMBER A SERIES OF TAPE RECORDINGS BEING MADE--POETRY READINGS.
I'M PARTICULARLY INTERESTED IN MR. WINCHESTER'S READINGS OF THE ROMANTIC POETS.
I WOULD LIKE TO BORROW ONE OF THE RECORDINGS.
FOR OLD TIMES' SAKE.
AH... WELL, YOU SEE... THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT I MEAN, MR. WINCHESTER LEFT US UNDER SOMETHING OF A CLOUD.
BAD BUSINESS. THE SCANDAL ALMOST PUT AN END TO THE SCHOOL...
THERE ARE CERTAIN OLD WOUNDS, WAYNE... WOUNDS WHICH I WOULD BE MOST RELUCTANT TO RE-OPEN.
I SEE.

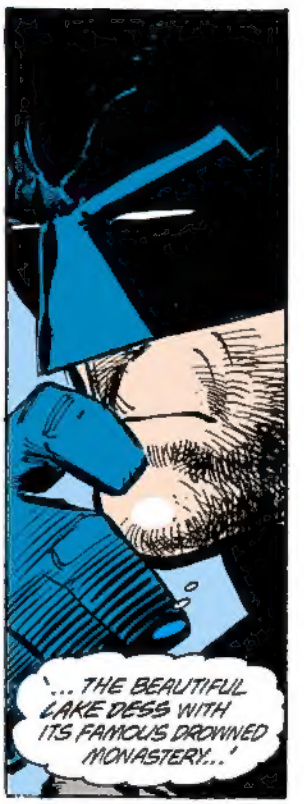

I AM, OF COURSE, WILLING TO MAKE A RATHER *SUBSTANTIAL DONATION* TO THE SCHOOL FUND.
AH.
PLEASE *EXCUSE* ME FOR A MOMENT, MR. WAYNE.
SORRY TO TAKE SUCH A LONG TIME.
I HOPE *THIS* MAY PROVE USEFUL.

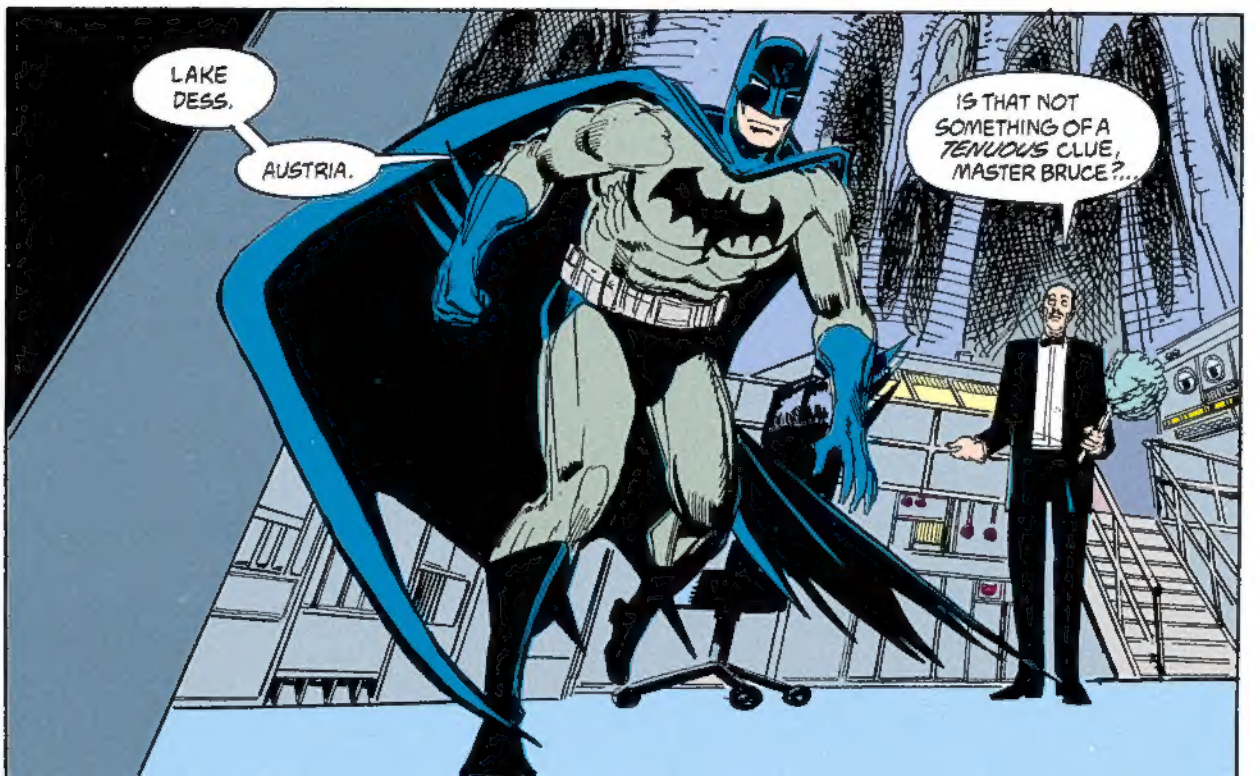

"...AND FOR MANY A TIME I HAVE BEEN HALF IN LOVE WITH EASEFUL DEATH,
'CALL'D HIM SOFT NAMES IN MANY A MUSÉD RHYME, TO TAKE INTO THE AIR MY QUIET BREATH;
"NOW MORE THAN EVER, IT SEEMS RICH TO DIE, TO CEASE UPON THE MIDNIGHT WITH NO PAIN,"
AUSTRIA.
THE VOICE ANALYSIS IDENTIFIES HIM AS COMING FROM AUSTRIA.
THAT'S ABOUT AS SPECIFIC AS IT'S LIKELY TO GET AT THIS STAGE.
"WHILE THOU ART POURING FORTH THY SOUL ABROAD IN SUCH AN ECSTASY!'"
WHO IS HE?
WHAT DOES HE WANT IN GOTHAM? WHAT'S HIS PLAN?
I THOUGHT I COULD CROSS-REFERENCE WITH THIS TAPE OF REGIONAL DIALECTS.
MAYBE PIN HIM DOWN A LITTLE MORE...
..."VIENNA, SALZBURG, THE BEAUTIFUL LAKE DESS WITH ITS FAMOUS DROWNED MONASTERY..." IT SOUNDS LIKE A MARVELOUS TOUR.
WHAT DO YOU THINK, BRUCE?
MY GOD.

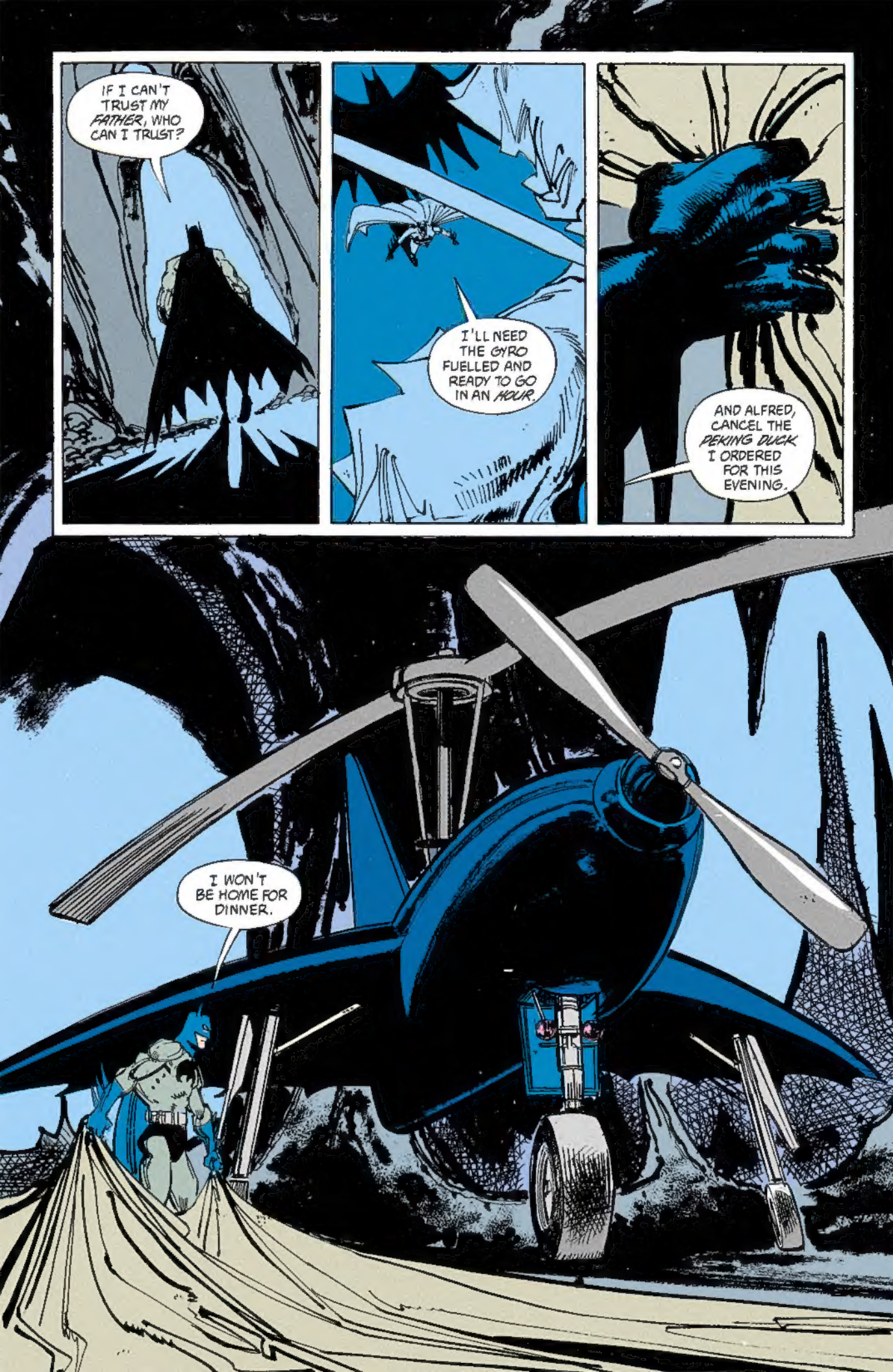

THAT'S MY FATHER... MY DAD.
I MUST HAVE FILED THE TAPE WRONGLY... I...
I WANT TO HEAR IT BACK AGAIN. CAN I HEAR MYSELF BACK?


IT'S NOT A TOY, BRUCE. YOU HAVE TO LEARN TO RESPECT MACHINERY LIKE THIS.
WE'LL HEAR THE PLAYBACK IN A MINUTE.


SO HOW ABOUT IT MARTHA? I CAN BOOK A FLIGHT TOMORROW IF YOU...


'... THE BEAUTIFUL LAKE DESS WITH ITS FAMOUS DROWNED MONASTERY...'


LAKE DESS.
AUSTRIA.
IS THAT NOT SOMETHING OF A TENUOUS CLUE, MASTER BRUCE?...


IF I CAN'T TRUST MY FATHER, WHO CAN I TRUST?
I'LL NEED THE GYRO FUELLED AND READY TO GO IN AN HOUR.
AND ALFRED, CANCEL THE PEKING DUCK I ORDERED FOR THIS EVENING.
I WON'T BE HOME FOR DINNER.

FOR GOD'S SAKE, MORGENSTERN! I'VE BEEN WITH YOU FOR SIX YEARS!
DON'T DO THIS!
I'M BEGGING YOU.

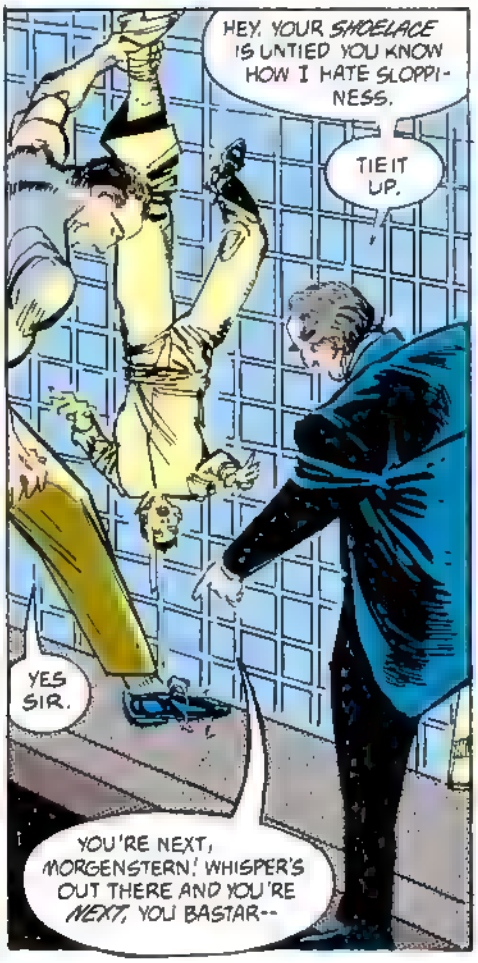
THAT'S MISTER MORGENSTERN TO YOU, HENRY.
AND IT'S SIX YEARS TOO MANY, I THINK. YOU GOT THE IDEA NOW YOU CAN SAY AND DO ANYTHING YOU WANT, HUH?

LIKE, FOR INSTANCE, YOU TOLD BUNNY BABBITT IT WAS ME WHO POISONED OTTAVIO. WHAT ARE YOU TRYING TO DO, HUH? TAKING OVER THIS CITY IS A VERY DELICATE OPERATION, AND YOU'RE SCREWING IT UP WITH YOUR BIG MOUTH.

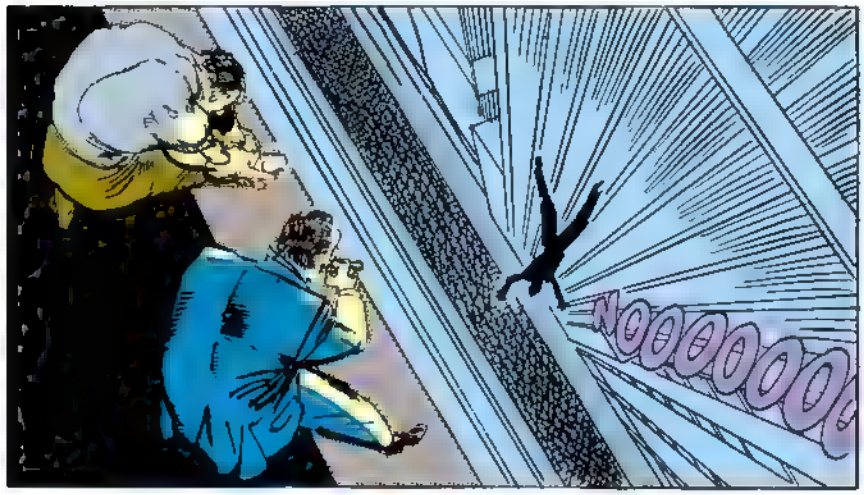
BABBITT'S ON OUR SIDE, FOR GOD'S SAKE!
BABBITT'S DOG FOOD.
HOW SIMPLE DO I HAVE TO MAKE THIS, HENRY? I WANT PEOPLE TO THINK THAT OTTAVIO WAS KILLED BY THIS GHOST GUY-- THIS MR. WHISPER. GOT THAT?

MY ARM'S GETTING TIRED, MR. MORGENSTERN.
YOU HEAR THAT? HIS ARM'S GETTING TIRED.
DON'T LET HIM DROP ME! DON'T LET HIM DROP ME!
I'LL TELL YOU ANYTHING! WHAT'LL I TELL YOU?

YOUR TELLING DAYS ARE *OVER*, HENRY
I WANT YOU TO SERIOUSLY START THINKING ABOUT YOUR NEW LIFE AS A *STAIN* ON THE SIDEWALK.


HEY. YOUR *SHOELACE* IS UNTIED YOU KNOW HOW I HATE SLOPPI-NESS.
TIE IT UP.
YES SIR.
YOU'RE NEXT, MORGENSTERN! WHISPER'S OUT THERE AND YOU'RE *NEXT*, YOU BASTAR--

WISHES *CAN* COME TRUE.


NOOOOOOO!

BIG MOUTH TO THE END.
"*WHISPER*", MY ASS! ALL I NEED NOW IS FOR *BATMAN* TO VANISH FOR A COUPLE OF DAYS AND...
MR. MORGENSTERN

LOOK!
LOOK THERE!
WELL, WELL, WELL.

12
1
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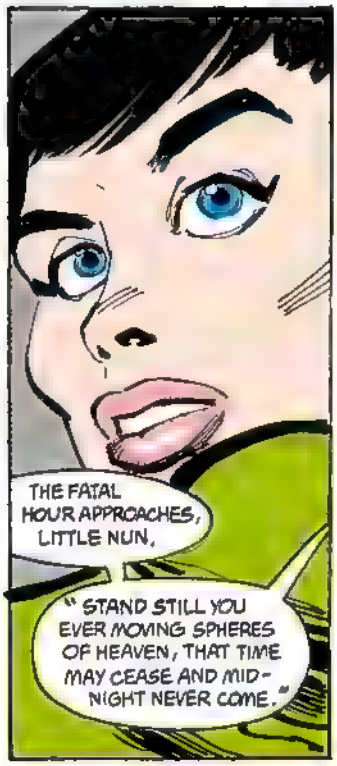
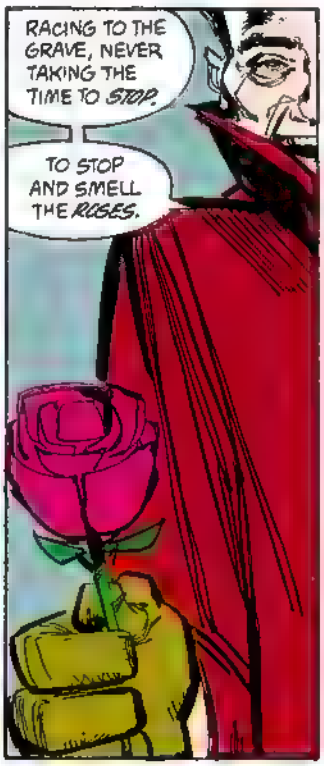
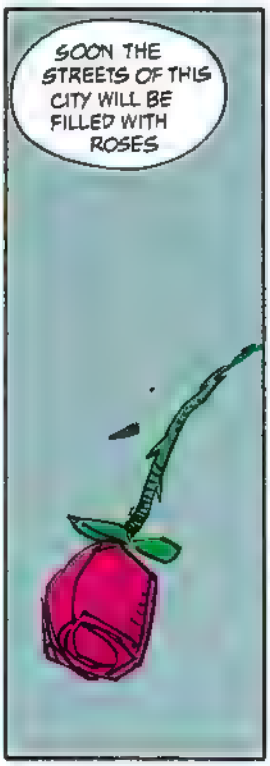
11

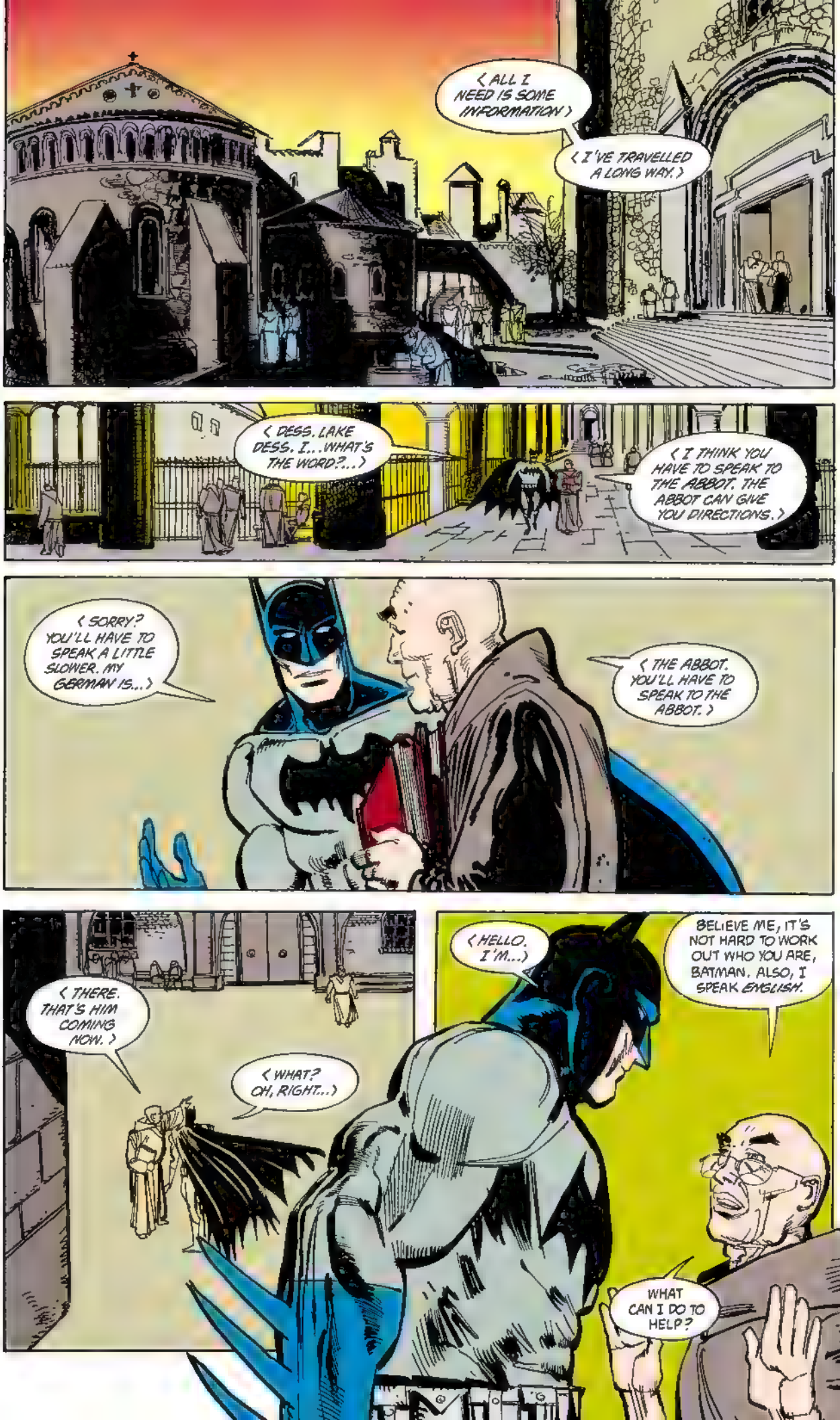

THE FATAL HOUR APPROACHES, LITTLE NUN,
" STAND STILL YOU EVER MOVING SPHERES OF HEAVEN, THAT TIME MAY CEASE AND MID-NIGHT NEVER COME."

DON'T BE AFRAID, LITTLE NUN, DON T RUN AWAY.
WHY MUST THE YOUNG BE ALWAYS IN SUCH HURRY?


RACING TO THE GRAVE, NEVER TAKING THE TIME TO STOP.
TO STOP AND SMELL THE ROSES.


SOON THE STREETS OF THIS CITY WILL BE FILLED WITH ROSES

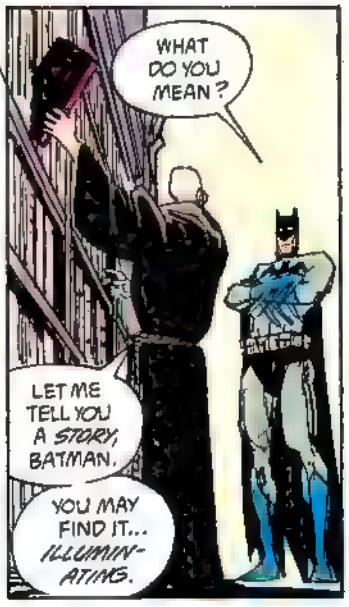
I LIKE ROSES.


(ALL I NEED IS SOME INFORMATION)
(I'VE TRAVELLED A LONG WAY.)
(DESS. LAKE DESS. I...WHAT'S THE WORD?...)
(I THINK YOU HAVE TO SPEAK TO THE ABBOT. THE ABBOT CAN GIVE YOU DIRECTIONS.)
(SORRY? YOU'LL HAVE TO SPEAK A LITTLE SLOWER. MY GERMAN IS...)
(THE ABBOT. YOU'LL HAVE TO SPEAK TO THE ABBOT.)
(THERE. THAT'S HIM COMING NOW.)
(WHAT? OH, RIGHT...)
(HELLO. I'M...)
BELIEVE ME, IT'S NOT HARD TO WORK OUT WHO YOU ARE, BATMAN. ALSO, I SPEAK ENGLISH.
WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP?

...I RATHER THINK YOU HAVE ALARMED MANY OF THE BROTHERS, BATMAN.
YOUR APPEARANCE IS SOMEWHAT DISTRESSING.
ONLY TO THE GUILTY, I WOULD HOPE.

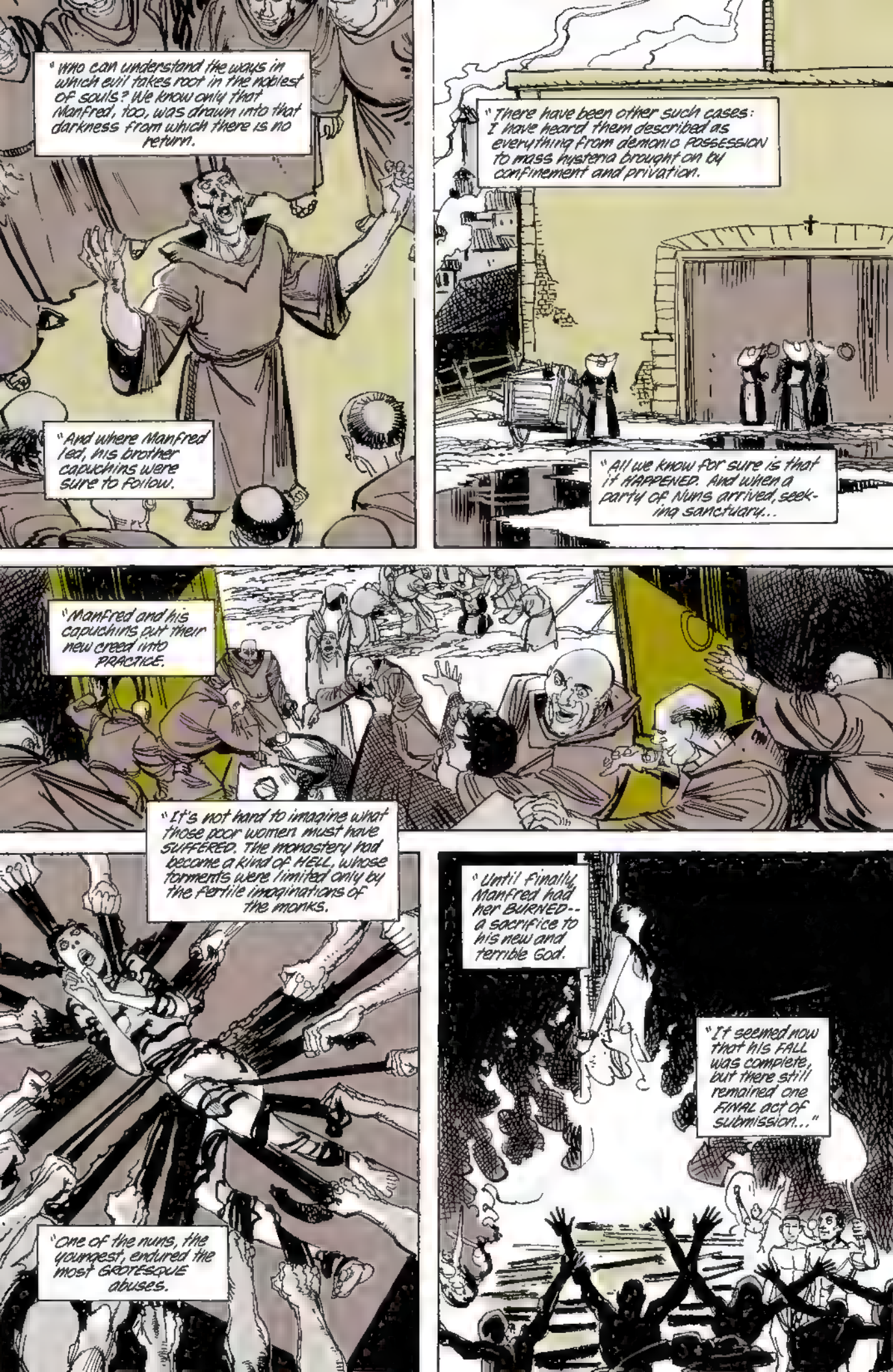
WHY HAVE WE COME HERE? ALL I NEED FROM YOU ARE DIRECTIONS...
AND YOU SHALL HAVE THEM. FIRST, HOWEVER, I'D LIKE TO SHOW YOU SOMETHING THAT MAY PROVE INTERESTING.

OUR MONASTERY, AS YOU PROBABLY KNOW, WAS BUILT IN THE 18TH CENTURY, TO REPLACE AN EARLIER BUILDING.
I'M FASCINATED BY THE WAY IN WHICH HISTORY AND FOLKLORE SO OFTEN DRESS IN ONE ANOTHER'S CLOTHING.

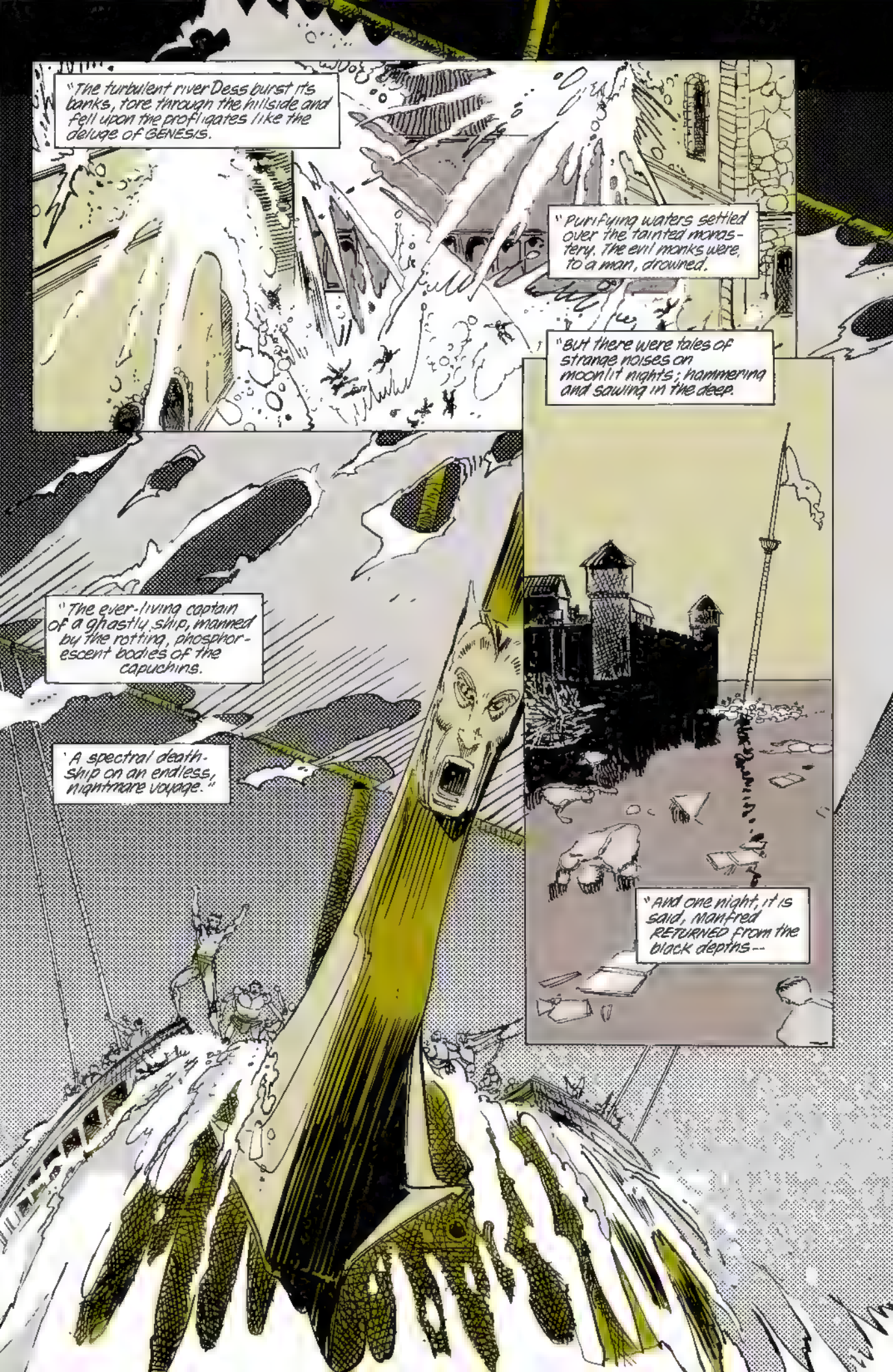

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
LET ME TELL YOU A STORY, BATMAN.
YOU MAY FIND IT... ILLUMINATING.

IT BEGAN SOME THREE HUNDRED YEARS AGO, NOT FAR FROM THIS SPOT.
IMAGINE THE SKIES CHOKED WITH THE OILY SMOKE OF BURNING. IMAGINE EUROPE IN THE TERRIBLE GRIP OF THE BLACK DEATH...

"Untouched by the pestilence which raged through the countryside, stood the Monastery of the CAPUCHINS.
"Then, as now, the Monastery was the home of Humble Men, Godly Men.
"And of these men, the most pious and devout was one BROTHER MANFRED -- perfect and uncorrupted, a shining example to his fellows.
"And yet, in that perfection lay the seeds of Manfred's downfall... for Manfred was PROUD.
"PRIDE! The sin that toppled Lucifer from heaven! Pride, that most subtle of serpents.
"Proud of his learning, proud of his rejection of worldly desire, Manfred walked into the OLDEST of traps.
"He became captivated by a certain novitiate -- a strange, melancholy youth named CONRAD. In the boy, Manfred recognized something of his own nature, perhaps.
"Then one day, Conrad made a terrible CONFESSION: 'Only you can help me, Holy Father! You are the finest of men and my sin is terrible!'
"And there, again, the appeal to Manfred's PRIDE! Now he saw the boy as a CHALLENGE. New sins to face and overcome!
"How could Manfred have known what lay ahead as he accompanied the youth into the CRYPT --
"--And found there a blasphemous ALTAR.
"The youth, it seemed, had been corrupted by the heretical belief that SIN is the road to salvation, and that by indulging in every VICE we can come more humbly into the sight of merciful God.

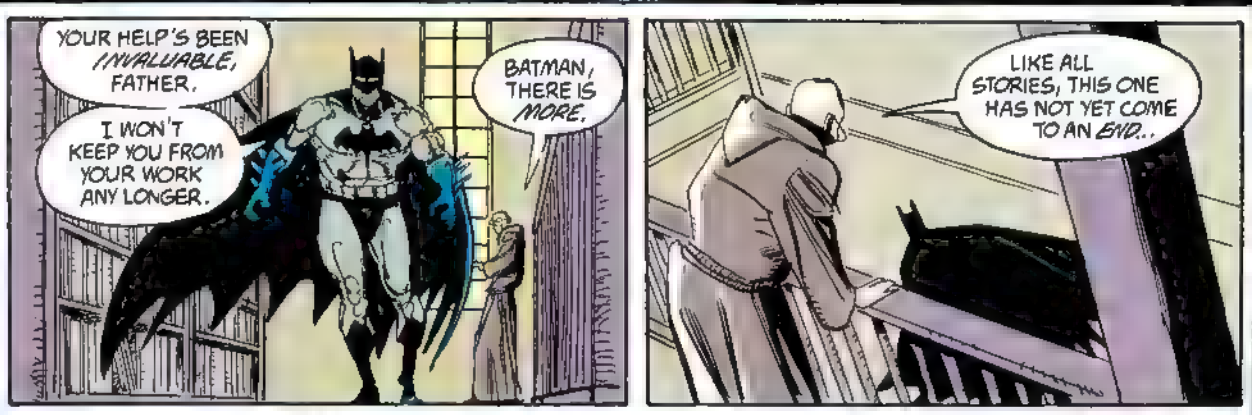

"Who can understand the ways in which evil takes root in the noblest of souls? We know only that Manfred, too, was drawn into that darkness from which there is no return.
"And where Manfred led, his brother capuchins were sure to follow.
"There have been other such cases: I have heard them described as everything from demonic possession to mass hysteria brought on by confinement and privation.
"All we know for sure is that it HAPPENED. And when a party of Nuns arrived, seeking sanctuary...
"Manfred and his capuchins put their new creed into PRACTICE.
"It's not hard to imagine what those poor women must have SUFFERED. The monastery had become a kind of HELL, whose torments were limited only by the fertile imaginations of the monks.
"One of the nuns, the youngest, endured the most GROTESQUE abuses.
"Until finally Manfred had her BURNED-- a sacrifice to his new and terrible God.
"It seemed now that his FALL was complete, but there still remained one FINAL act of submission..."

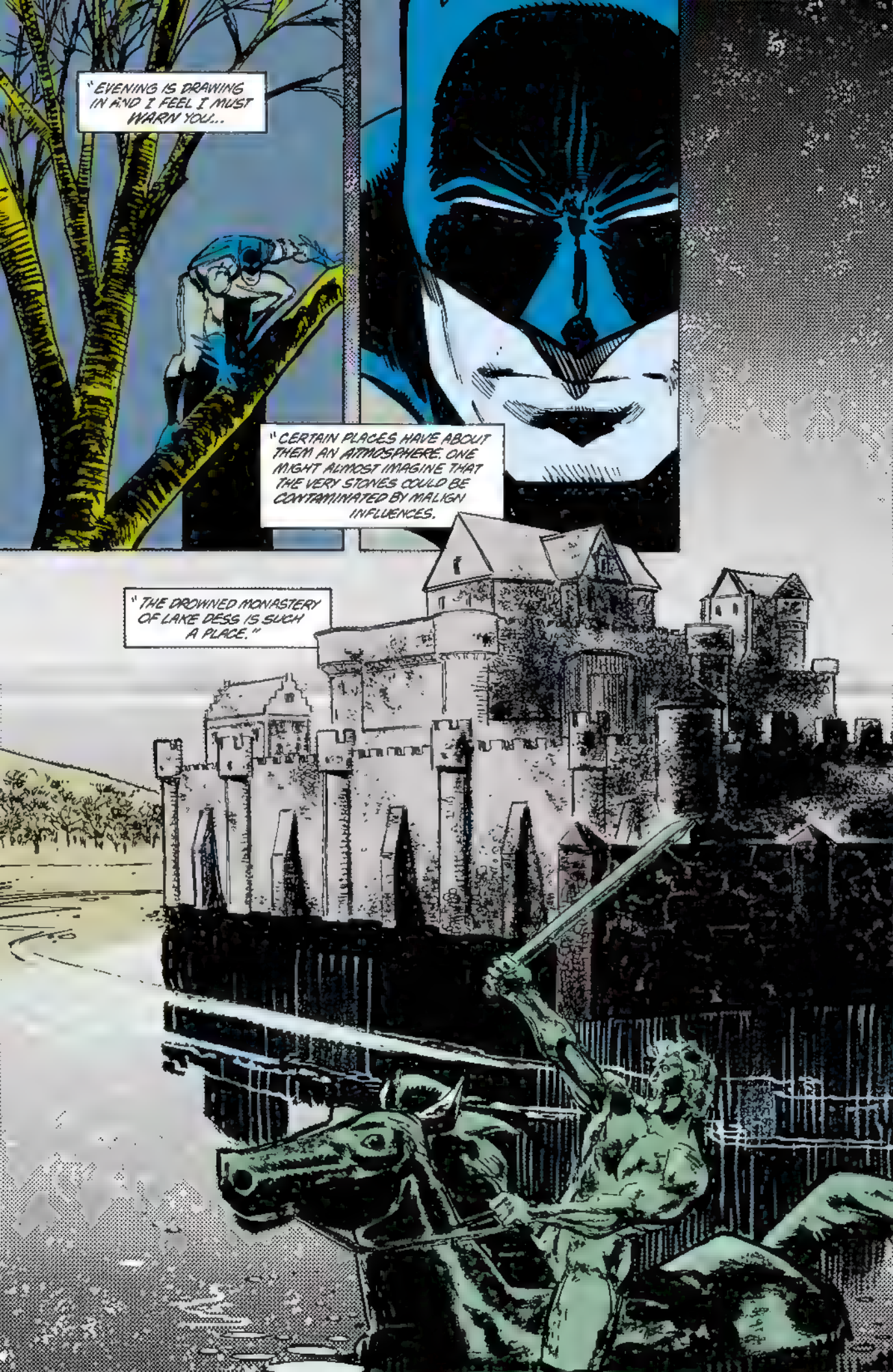
"Shortly after the death of the young nun, Manfred discovered on his body the first signs of the PLAGUE.
"Fear of this most monstrous of deaths drove Manfred to that final desperate act.
"On may eve he called upon the fallen angel and pledged his SOUL to hell, in return for release from the plague and three hundred years of LIFE.
"Three hundred years, during which nothing could kill or harm him.
"Hell was as good as it's word. Manfred RECOVERED from the plague.
"Thus, under the jaded eye of their undying, miraculous leader, the monks threw themselves deeper into debauch.
"While the world outside lay sick and dying, the monastery thrived as a kingdom of sin.
"But for the degenerate capuchins, there was to be no escape from God's judgment."

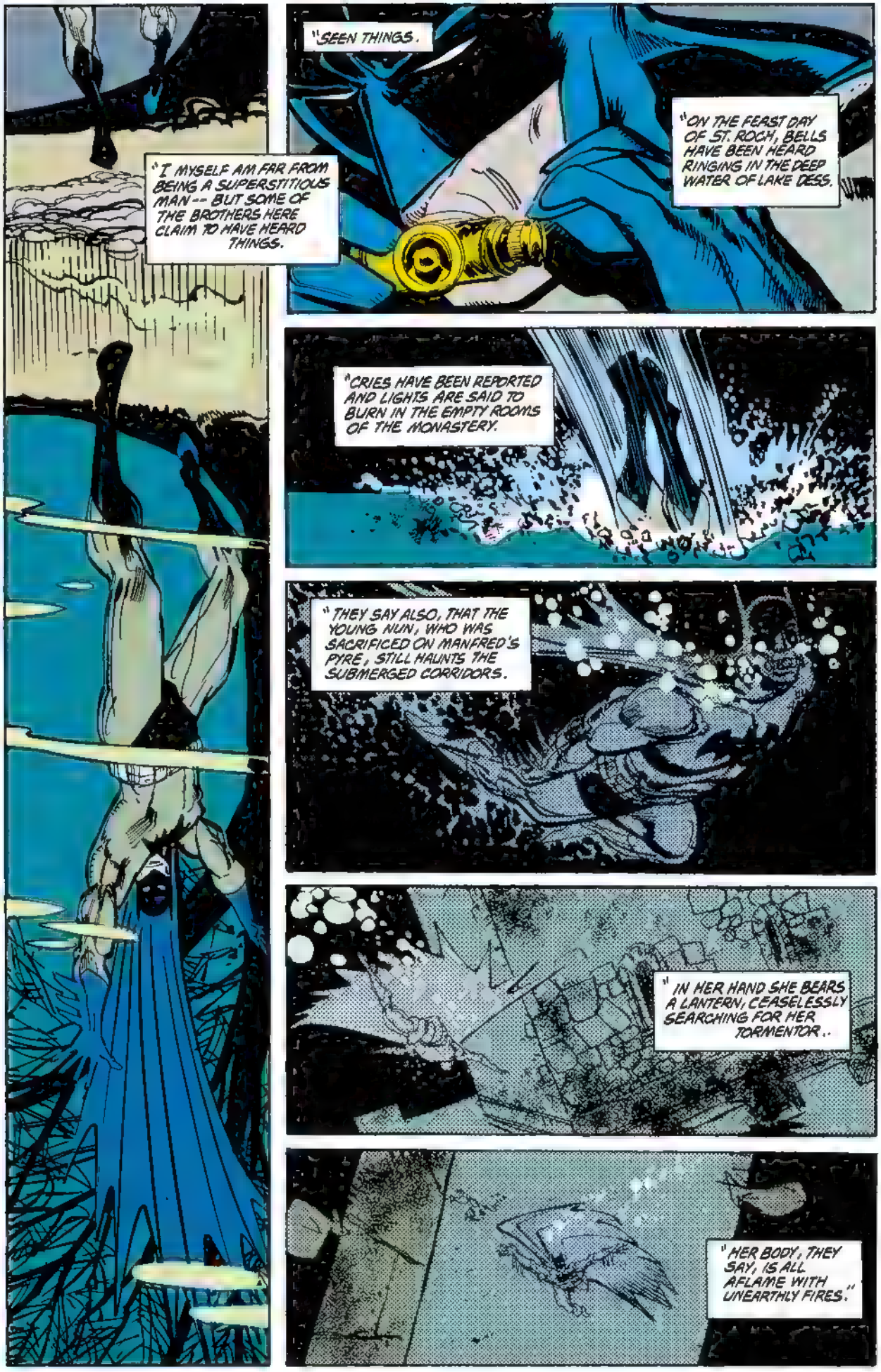

"The turbulent river Dess burst its banks, tore through the hillside and fell upon the profligates like the deluge of GENESIS.
"Purifying waters settled over the tainted monastery. The evil monks were, to a man, drowned.
"But there were tales of strange noises on moonlit nights; hammering and sawing in the deep.
"The ever-living captain of a ghastly ship, manned by the rotting, phosphorescent bodies of the capuchins.
"A spectral death-ship on an endless, nightmare voyage."
"And one night, it is said, Manfred RETURNED from the black depths--

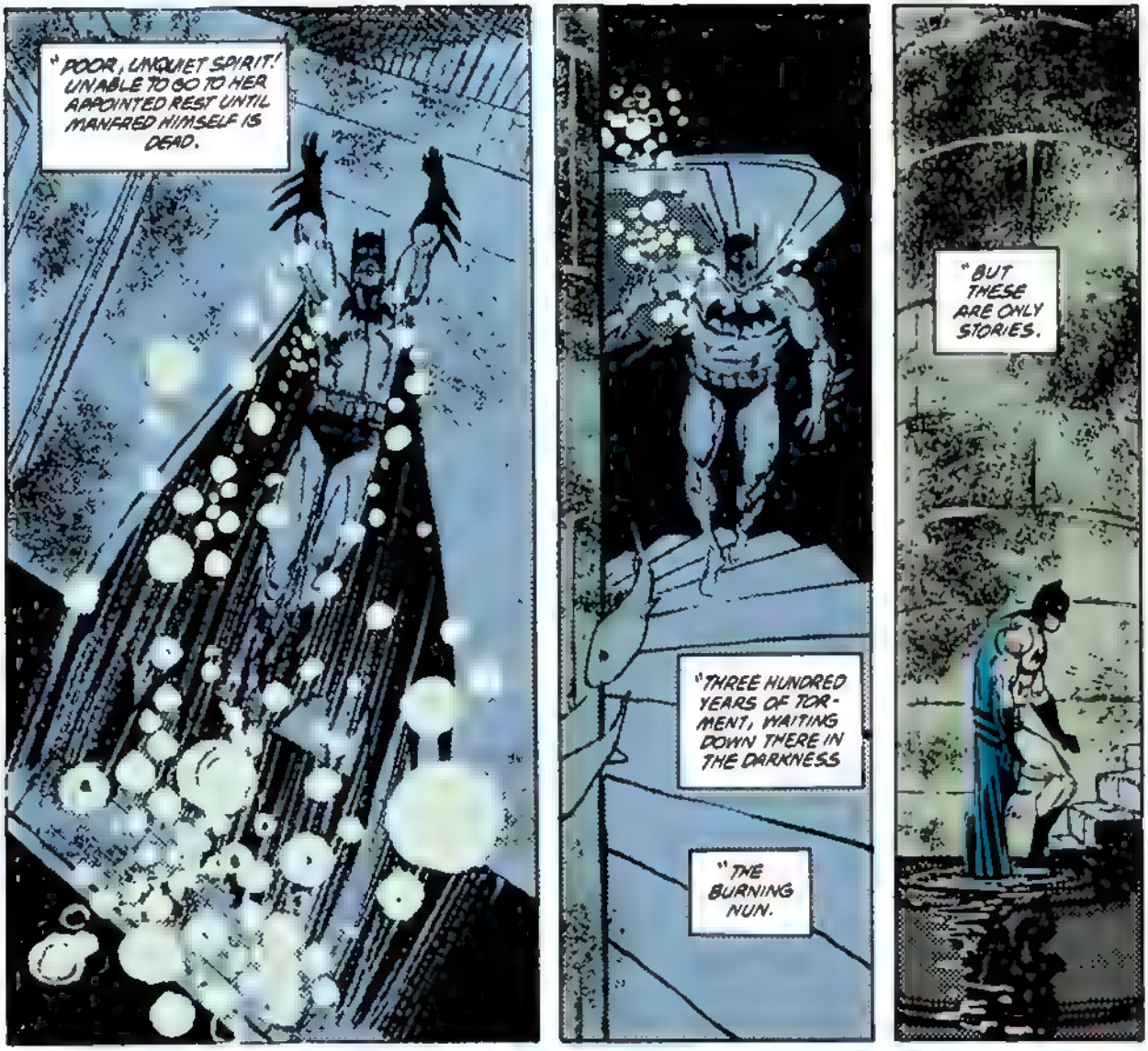
BUT THESE ARE ONLY *FOLKTALES*, STORIES FOR STORMY NIGHTS.
I BELIEVE THEY SIMPLY DIED IN THE PLAGUE. THEY DIED AND THE VALLEY WAS *FLOODED* TO CONTAIN THE PESTILENCE.
I DON'T *BELIEVE* IN DEVILS. THE REAL TRUTH IS FAR *MORE* HORRIBLE.
THE KINGDOM OF HELL IS *WITHIN* US.
PERHAPS.
BUT IF THE STORY WAS *TRUE*, MANFRED MIGHT STILL BE *ALIVE*, UNCHANGED.
THREE HUNDRED YEARS HAVE *PASSED*. HELL WOULD BE CALLING HIM TO ACCOUNT.
HIS SOUL WOULD BE *FORFEIT* AT LAST.
WHERE IS LAKE DESS FROM HERE?

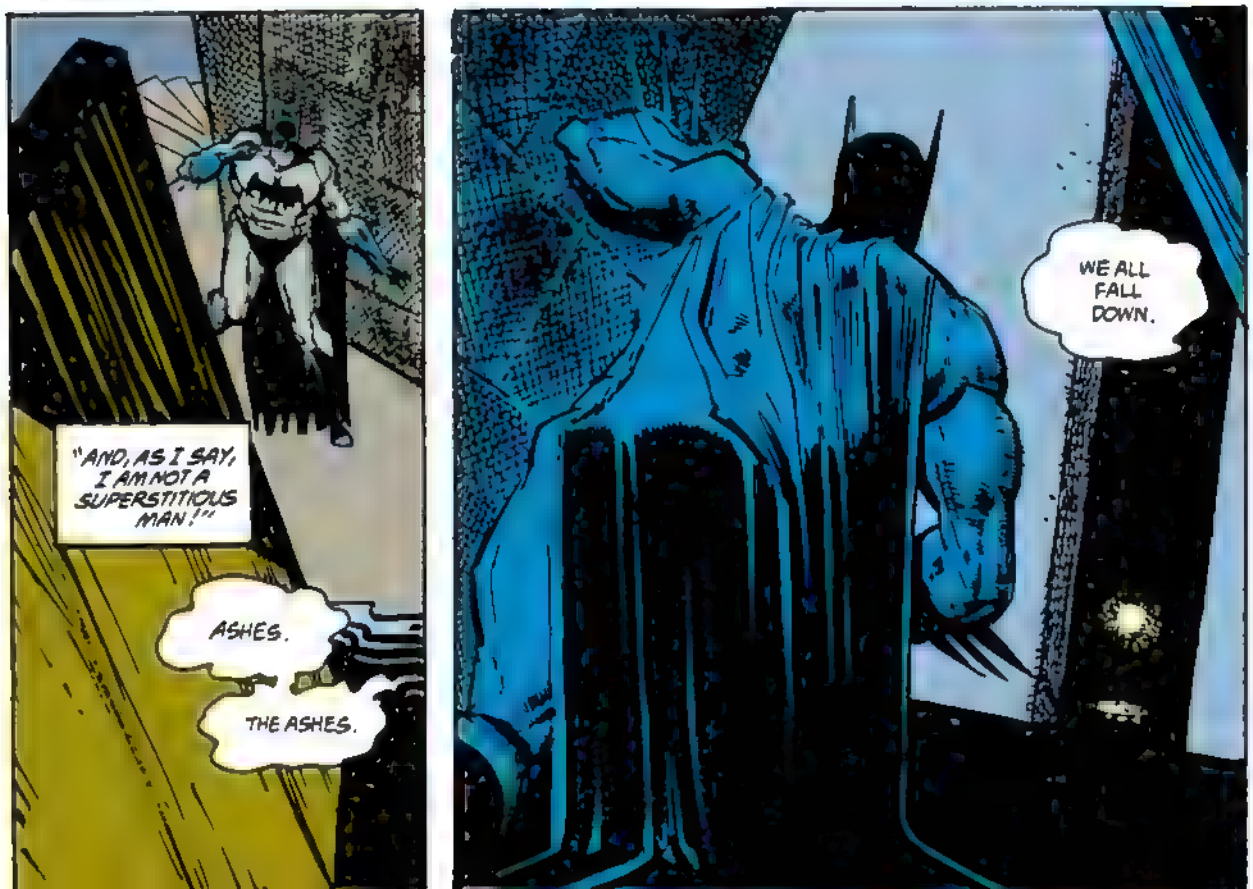
YOU CAN JUST SEE THE RIVER DESS FROM THIS WINDOW. SEE THERE?
FOLLOW THE RIVER AND YOU WILL COME TO THE LAKE.

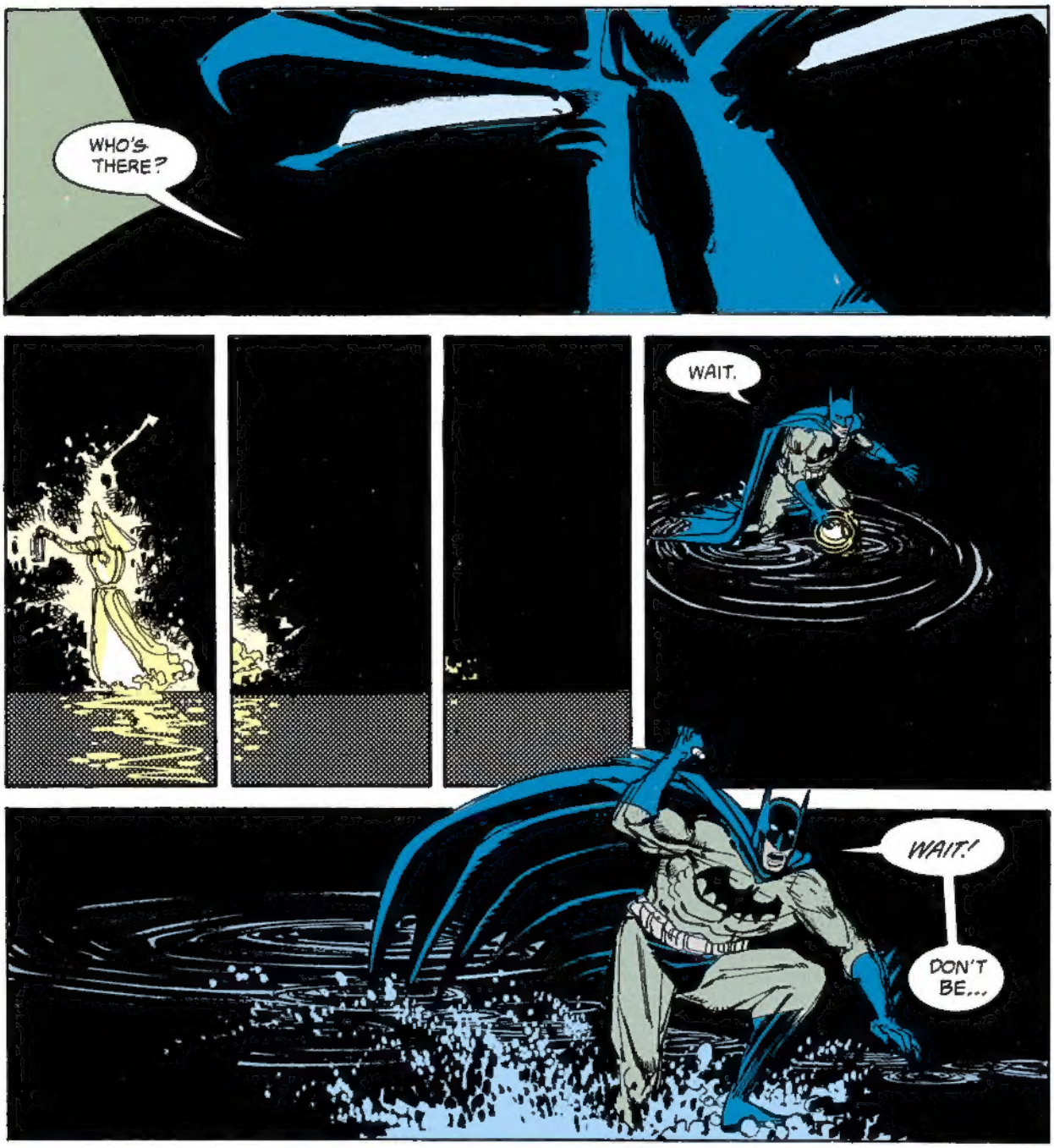

YOUR HELP'S BEEN *INVALUABLE*, FATHER.
I WON'T KEEP YOU FROM YOUR WORK ANY LONGER.
BATMAN, THERE IS *MORE*.
LIKE ALL STORIES, THIS ONE HAS NOT YET COME TO AN *END*..

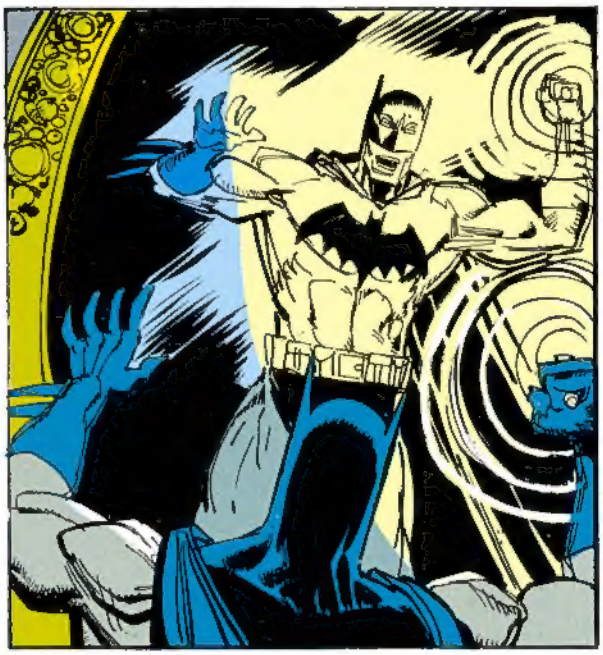

"EVENING IS DRAWING IN AND I FEEL I MUST WARN YOU...
"CERTAIN PLACES HAVE ABOUT THEM AN ATMOSPHERE. ONE MIGHT ALMOST IMAGINE THAT THE VERY STONES COULD BE CONTAMINATED BY MALIGN INFLUENCES.
"THE DROWNED MONASTERY OF LAKE DESS IS SUCH A PLACE."

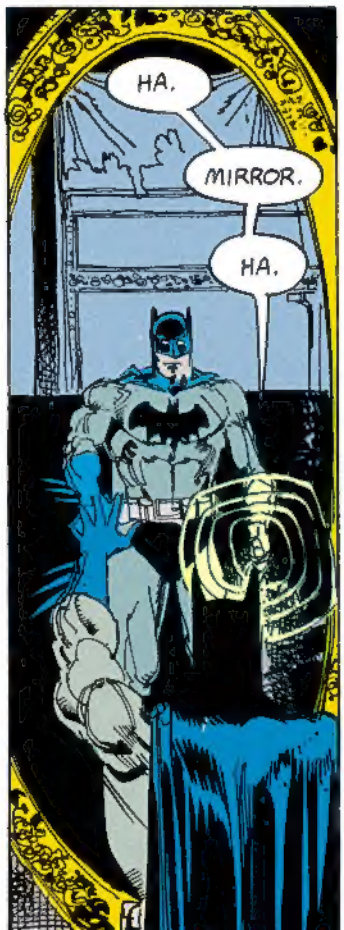

"I MYSELF AM FAR FROM BEING A SUPERSTITIOUS MAN -- BUT SOME OF THE BROTHERS HERE CLAIM TO HAVE HEARD THINGS.
"SEEN THINGS.
"ON THE FEAST DAY OF ST. ROCH, BELLS HAVE BEEN HEARD RINGING IN THE DEEP WATER OF LAKE DESS.
"CRIES HAVE BEEN REPORTED AND LIGHTS ARE SAID TO BURN IN THE EMPTY ROOMS OF THE MONASTERY.
"THEY SAY ALSO, THAT THE YOUNG NUN, WHO WAS SACRIFICED ON MANFRED'S PYRE, STILL HAUNTS THE SUBMERGED CORRIDORS.
"IN HER HAND SHE BEARS A LANTERN, CEASELESSLY SEARCHING FOR HER TORMENTOR..
"HER BODY, THEY SAY, IS ALL AFLAME WITH UNEARTHLY FIRES."


"POOR, UNQUIET SPIRIT! UNABLE TO GO TO HER APPOINTED REST UNTIL MANFRED HIMSELF IS DEAD.
"THREE HUNDRED YEARS OF TORMENT, WAITING DOWN THERE IN THE DARKNESS
"THE BURNING NUN.
"BUT THESE ARE ONLY STORIES.


"AND, AS I SAY, I AM NOT A SUPERSTITIOUS MAN!"
ASHES.
THE ASHES.
WE ALL FALL DOWN.


WHO'S THERE?
WAIT.
WAIT!
DON'T BE...
UH!




HA.
MIRROR.
HA.

"UNLOCK THE ROSE."
"UNLOCK THE ROSE."
THE CATHEDRAL.
MY GOD.
OH MY GOD.

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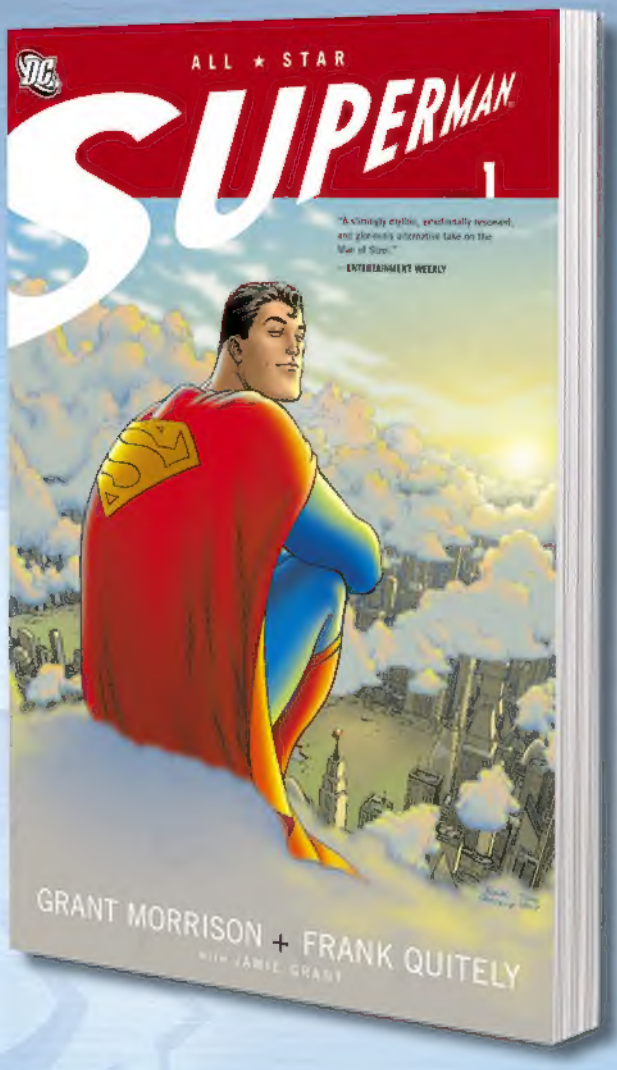

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